

SPACE EDUCATION AND OUTREACH SYMPOSIUM (E1)

Space Exploration Education (5)

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NEXT GEN AT JOHNSON SPACE CENTER - BOLDLY EXPANDING THE FRONTIERS OF
HUMAN SPACE EXPLORATION

Abstract

Younger generations aren't connecting to NASA's vision or mission anymore. The current and future missions of the agency fail to capture the hearts and minds of the world's young people as the Apollo Program once did. In 2009, there is still passion for space, but that passion is limited to largely isolated circles inside the aerospace and technology communities. If progress is to be made on the frontiers of space in the coming decades, proactive measures must be taken to expand NASA's engagement of younger generations.

As a premier space center in the world's human spaceflight efforts, the Johnson Space Center (JSC) stands at an auspicious junction in history to connect young people to space exploration. Realizing this position as a world leader, JSC's Advanced Planning Office sponsored a 2-day workshop with a group of thirty young professionals to gain insight into their ideas and desires for the future of the space center they will eventually inherit. The group's efforts culminated in a long-term vision for JSC and specific implementation tactics to realize that vision. Throughout the process, the team found success with a fluid leadership model that adapted to the rapid dissemination of information required for the effort.

The team's vision for JSC to be a "collaborative, innovative, and integrated space center, boldly expanding the frontiers of human space exploration" and their associated findings have ignited a new conversation at every level of JSC which is spreading to other NASA centers and spaceflight communities.

In reaching out to its own future leaders to help craft the space center's future, JSC has taken a bold and innovative step to engage its workforce in realizing the long-term goals of space exploration. In doing so, the center has created a new organizational leadership model—one in which all generations can work together across institutional and hierarchical barriers—founded on openness, inclusion, transparency, and accountability. Opportunities have led team members to the doors of international aerospace conferences, NASA headquarters meetings, and have sparked conversations across a wide field ranging from small engineering teams to leadership groups at the Pentagon, United Nations, FAA, and U.S. Naval Academy.

This paper will document the leadership lessons learned as well as the team's efforts to engage its own generation, create a vision for the space center and develop a community of passionate space professionals across all generations devoted to realizing a brighter future for space exploration.